

questions & concerns

the flu & the flu shot

"I have heard a lot of things about the flu, but what exactly is it and why should I be so concerned?"

The flu is a serious illness, especially for young children, older adults, pregnant women and those with certain medical conditions who can become very ill if infected. Those medical conditions include: diabetes, heart disease, asthma, kidney disease, cancer and HIV/AIDS. Less commonly, even young, otherwise healthy people have to be hospitalized. The greatest concern is that between 10,000–30,000 Americans die of the flu each year depending on how severe the strain is.

"I heard the flu shot gives you the flu or can make you sick. Is this true?"

Many people believe that the flu shot can give you the flu, but it doesn't. This is a very unfortunate myth that prevents too many people from getting the protection that the vaccine provides. Flu vaccines help your body produce antibodies that protect you from influenza infection.

Some people do experience some minor side effects from the shot like redness, soreness or swelling where the shot was given; and/or a low grade fever or aches. These side effects are generally mild and last only a day or two after the shot and should not be mistaken for the flu, which lasts longer and is more severe. Over the counter medications may relieve these discomforts.

"Needles really scare me. I just can't get the flu shot. Are there any ways I can still protect myself without getting the shot?"

Many people do not like needles. For some, there is another option. Vaccination with the nasal spray flu vaccine is an option for healthy people, ages 2 to 49 years, who are not pregnant. Ask your health care provider if it is right for you or your family members. No one likes getting a shot, but getting the flu vaccine can have great health benefits for you. Remember, some minor discomfort from the shot itself is better than taking the risk of getting the flu.



www.scdhec.gov/flu
800.868.0404



protect yourself.
protect your family.
prevent the flu.



"I can't afford to miss work. If I get sick what should I do?"

If you do get sick, it is very important that you stay home and get plenty of rest. You should drink plenty of liquids like water, juice or light broth. The same is true for children, they need to stay home from school if they are sick. It is important that you do not go back to work or school until at least 24 hours after your fever and other symptoms are gone.

The flu is very contagious. It is possible to infect your loved ones, friends and co-workers even before you know you are sick. Most adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 -7 days after becoming sick.

"I have antibiotics left over from the last time I was sick. Can't I use them to treat the flu?"

No. Antibiotics are for illnesses caused by bacteria. The flu is a viral illness that will not be cured by antibiotics, however, other medications called antivirals may be prescribed for treatment of the flu in individuals who are at high risk of developing complications.

Generally, most people will recover from the flu if they stay home, drink plenty of fluids and rest. Over the counter medications are available to help alleviate the symptoms, but not cure the flu.

If you are prescribed an antibiotic for another illness, you should make sure you take it exactly as the doctor tells you. Do not save your medication and assume that you can not use it to treat another illness, nor should you pass it on to another family member or friend.

"I'm pregnant with our second child. Should my family get flu shots every year?"

Yes. The influenza virus may change from year to year so you want to be protected with the vaccine that is prepared each year to match these changes.

It is especially important for certain groups of people to get vaccinated every year, including pregnant women.

"When should we get a vaccine and where can we go to get it?"

The flu season in the United States occurs between November and March. That's when the flu is circulating at its highest levels, but we do see cases of the flu at other times of the year. We strongly encourage getting the flu shot as early in the flu season as possible. That's the best measure to get protection through the flu season. You should contact your healthcare provider or local health department about getting the vaccine. The flu shot is also widely available at many chain pharmacies across the state.

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